

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
WESTERN AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE #1
MEETING NOTES**

Subject: Western Avenue Advisory Committee – Meeting #1

Date, Time & Place: February 23, 2010, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Cambridge Senior Center

Present

Committee Members

Lawrence Adkins	Bill August	Mertin Betts	Velmer Brooks
Kathy Cannon	Abdullah Daoud	Reuben Dottin	Caitlin Gallagher
David Gibbs	Erin Gullage	Margaret Mary Krey	Marc Leuchner
Bob Nesson	Brad Nissenbaum	Eran Segev	Artis Spears

City of Cambridge

Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Jeff Rosenblum (CDD)	Bill Deignan (CDD)
Jim Wilcox (DPW)	Kelly Dunn (DPW)	Elaine Thorne (CDD)

CDD = Community Development Department DPW = Department of Public Works

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (HDR Engineering, Inc.)

Public (signed in)

Carolyn Shipley Kevin Whitfield

*****SEE ALSO POWERPOINT SLIDES OF PRESENTATION*****

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND COMMITTEE PROCESS (Susanne Rasmussen)

- Susanne welcomed the attendees; reviewed the agenda; and introduced City staff and Consultant team.
- Other members of City staff will participate from time to time during the project, including staff from the Traffic, Transportation and Parking Department, as well as other consulting team members.

2. INTRODUCTION OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- The committee members introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their personal connection to Western Avenue, as well as what they liked about Western Avenue.
- Background of Committee Members includes:
 - Residents, both long and short-time
 - Business owners
 - Members of civic associations (Riverside and Cambridgeport Neighborhood Associations)
 - Members of Cambridge Pedestrian and Bicycle Committees
 - Local community organizations (e.g., Cambridge Community Center)
 - Members represent a geographic diversity along the corridor
- Initial thoughts on what Advisory Committee members like about Western Avenue

- Friendly neighborhood feeling
- Easy to walk to Central Square
- Convenient to Mass Turnpike
- Cafes and restaurants (such as Andala Café, Basta Pasta, etc.)
- Gateway to both Central Square and Charles River
- Easy to find parking
- Bicycle lane
- Businesses have on-street parking and are easy to find
- People; diversity
- Direct route to Brighton; Boston
- Bright and sunny
- Easy walk to MBTA

3. COMMITTEE PROCESS and OTHER PROJECT OUTREACH (Susanne Rasmussen/Jeff Rosenblum)

- There were a lot of people interested in being appointed to the Advisory Committee, almost twice as many as were accepted onto the committee.
- The City carefully selected people with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests.
- The City wants the process to be one of consensus building, informed by technical information and “tools” which will be provided by City and Consultant staff during the course of the project.
- It is not expected that all members of the Committee will agree 100% on all elements. It is also not the City’s intention to “vote” on project elements. Rather, general agreement is sought on the plan so that the Community Development Department can advise the City Manager on the recommended course(s) of actions.
- There will also be large Community-wide meetings oriented to the general public.
- Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public, and guests will have an opportunity for input at each meeting.
- This advisory process is being structured as a short, intensive, process.
 - Approximately 2 meetings per month through June
 - Less often after June (when the conceptual plan has been developed)
 - Will try not to meet during the peak of Summer
 - E-mails and other information will be provided in advance of each meeting, with relevant technical information.
- Jeff described some of the other methods which are being used for Community Outreach to get broad input and to reach those who do not typically attend formal meetings). Methods include:
 - Presentations at neighborhood associations
 - Workshops at Community Center
 - Youth Center outreach
 - Central Square Business Association
 - Informal walks

4. PROJECT GOALS AND OVERVIEW OF CITY POLICIES (Susanne Rasmussen)

- Western Avenue has many functions (All of these functions need to be balanced in the final design):
 - Regional roadway;
 - Neighborhood street;
 - Retail district;
 - Front yard.
- Certain City policies provide the backdrop for the City’s street and transportation projects, specifically:
 - Climate Protection Plan (has goal to reduce Single Occupancy Vehicle trips by 10% between 1990 and 2010)

- Growth Policies #22 and #23 (encourage non-automotive travel; reduce congestion without increasing through vehicular capacity) included in “Towards a Sustainable Future”, the City’s growth management policy
- These policies have been successful:
 - Cambridge has highest percentage of residents who walk to work of any City in the US
 - Bicycle travel is up 100% over the past 6 years based on regular counts the City conducts
- Susanne showed examples of specific street projects where these policies have been implemented over the past several years, reducing roadway pavement and improving conditions for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and adding green space:
 - Central Square
 - Cambridgeport Roadways
 - Brookline Street
 - Lafayette Square
- Based on the above policies, and information known about Western Avenue to date, the Preliminary Project Goals for the surface design include the following (and these will be revised/supplemented as the advisory committee and community processes continue:

— Ensure safety for all users	— Maintain adequate traffic flow
— Reinforce residential character	— Appropriate traffic speed
— Improve bike/ped/transit facilities	— Provide disability access
— Improve business access	— Meet stormwater goals

5. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS (Attendees)

The following comments were expressed by attendees. Duplicate comments have been condensed. *Where applicable, comment responses provided by City staff at the meeting are shown in italics.*

1. Is maintaining parking a goal? *Adequate parking will be added as a goal.*
2. What are some ideas for reducing traffic speed? This has gotten worse since the Police Station has closed. *This will be addressed in an upcoming meeting about design options.*
3. Will resident parking sticker issues be addressed? Is there a trend of increasing or decreasing number of permits issued? *This will be discussed at future meeting about parking. Can say that Citywide, number of resident stickers being issued has been declining over the past several years.*

6. PROJECT SCHEDULE AND SCOPE (Jeff Rosenblum)

- Project schedule is shown on Slide #19. Goal is to get general consensus on conceptual design by June; complete design in late 2010, and begin construction in Summer 2011.
- Geographic scope is generally from Memorial Drive to at least Franklin Street. Team will also study issues east of Green Street to Mass. Ave., but no construction money for that area is currently available. Will be coordinating design with MassDOT’s design process for the Western Avenue Bridge reconstruction project.
- Technical scope includes both surface and subsurface components (see Slides #21-26). The utilities are very old, and this project will address ongoing water quality issues by maximizing the extent of sewer/storm drain separation.
- The goal is to provide a holistic design that also uses surface components (rain gardens, reduction of impervious pavement, bio-engineering, etc.) to help address water quality issues. There have recently been some prototype installations of this nature on Brookline Street.
- Preliminary activities to date have included:

— Field investigations of exist. utils	— Utility flow-metering
— Calibrating drainage flow model	— Cleaning/video of exist. pipes
— Soil borings	— Building inspections/dye testing

- Traffic data collection
- Topographic survey
- There have also been emergency repairs to a failed section of sewer in the Gilman-Howard area; and this spring there will be repairs to the sewer at Putnam Avenue.

7. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS (Attendees)

1. What is general budget? Is State or Federal money involved? Permitting Issues? *Total project budget is about \$15 million. Amount available for surface improvements not known yet – will depend on extent of utility work required. This is all City Capital funding. No State or Federal environmental review thresholds are expected to be triggered.*
2. What will be the construction duration? *Approximately 24 calendar months. There will be likely be little to no activity during winter months.*
3. When were utilities last upgraded? *Not in recent years except for emergency repairs. Sewer and drain system from 1870's for the most part.*
4. Will there be work in the side streets? *Don't know yet. Work in main line of Western Avenue should help alleviate some side-street flooding issues.*
5. Is this more ambitious than other typical City projects? *There have been other recent successful City projects which have accomplished similar surface/subsurface goals.*
6. Will this project address deteriorated privately owned buildings? *Not specifically, although it is hoped that improving the public realm will lead to private investment.*
7. Will the sidewalk near Enterprise Car Rental be addressed? *Yes.*
8. Can this project accommodate future innovative public transit improvements such as electric buses, etc.? *While the City does long-term transit planning, this project will not include such infrastructure elements since funding for implementation of advanced bus technology is not available in the MBTA's budget in the foreseeable future.*
9. How will sewer service house connections be dealt with? Is there risk of damaging these connections? *There will not be wholesale replacement of house connections. Contractor will be responsible for any new damage to service connections.*
10. Is there is a steam tunnel across Western Avenue? *Yes, in the "inland" Memorial Drive sidewalk.*
11. Will one-way versus two-way traffic flow on Western Ave be considered? *Ideas like this can come up for discussion at a future meeting when we talk about options.*
12. How long will the improvements last once constructed? *They are designed to last for decades. It is not the intention to have non-emergency public or private utility work occur once this project is completed.*
13. Is there enough money in the budget to cover the risks associated with all of the unknown underground conditions? *The City always includes a contingency to cover design and construction issues. Track record of staying within budget has been good on recent projects.*

8. COMMITTEE INPUT: WHAT DO YOU LIKE / DISLIKE ABOUT WESTERN AVENUE? (Attendees)

Note: Duplicate comments have been condensed.

DISLIKE

- High vehicle speeds; traffic calming needed at Pleasant Street
- Vehicles don't stop for pedestrians in crosswalks
- Enforcement issues on Western and Putnam
- Trucks – more enforcement on Western needed
- There are not supposed to be buses on Putnam but there are
- Multiple comments about loud trucks/vibrations. Is there supposed to be a Truck ban at night? Hazardous materials carried? *City will explain the history of truck regulations on Western Avenue at the next meeting*

- Road not maintained – too much vibration felt in houses
- Bike lane next to parking is not safe
- Sidewalk lighting not adequate
- Signage for vehicles not adequate (wrong-way turns from side streets)
- Too much cut-through traffic
- Rodent problem, especially closer to west end
- Missing 25mph signage, so no one obeys it – general speeding
- Wrong-way cyclists, and cyclists on sidewalk
- Sidewalk surfaces are pedestrian/wheelchair/stroller unfriendly
- Businesses lack wheelchair/stroller access
- Not as vibrant and neighborhood-friendly as it used to be
- Too highway-like
- Air quality bad during rush hours – unhealthy to bike
- Abandoned/poorly maintained properties
- Street has negative image for people outside of neighborhood
- Like trees, but not having to rake leaves
- Tree roots make sidewalk impassable and inaccessible, cause drainage problems
- Trees not maintained (fallen branches, etc).
- No consistency to street character (both a like and a dislike)
- Riverbend Park closures – causes lots of congestion/pollution; can't keep windows open

LIKE

- Trees good; and help with heat island effect
- Lighting is OK – especially since upgraded at Howard
- Convenient, fast access to Mass Pike, other areas
- Vibrant neighborhood
- Parking is easy
- Good existing businesses; need to get the word out
- Easy to park bike
- Rich history; old but interesting buildings
- Never quiet – always something going on

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Attendees)

- Like flower-pots
- Status of truck ban?
- 25mph speed limit not marked, except at former Police Station

10. NEXT STEPS (J. Rosenblum)

- Advisory Committee meeting #2 (to be scheduled, early March), Draft Agenda:
 - Discussion of Community Goals
 - Presentation by Charlie Sullivan on history of area
 - Presentation of Existing Traffic Conditions
 - Committee to discuss potential design directions
- Community-wide meeting 1 sometime in late March